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Letter from A Newton to John Muir, 1864 Feb 5

Ambrose Newton

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[Original in possession of Mr. William Newton, Omaha, Nebraska]

Fountain Lake, February 16, '64.

[Envelope postmarked Portage City, Wis.]

[Envelope addressed to Mr. Ambrose Newton,
Middlefield, Mass.]

Dear friends:

It was with real pleasure that I received your long good letter yesterday so full of the experience and fruit of the aged Christian. I was sorry to think that it had been so long a time in the office, but I shall hereafter be more careful about my mail. A draft was being made just when I should have been starting for Ann Arbor which kept me at home, but letters addressed to Midland shall always reach me wherever I am. I was happy to perceive in your letter so much of that quiet resignation which the true living Christian can feel under all of the afflictions which may be placed in his cup. How dreadful must be the condition of those who, when called to pass through the same bitter waters of sorrow, have no heavenly arm to rest upon - all human aid so utterly powerless, and can look for none from God. How greatly we should prize and love that gospel which shews us the hand of a kind Heavenly Parent directing all the good and ill that makes life the changeful and mysterious thing which it is.

One of our neighbors must be borne to the grave tomorrow - a Christian who long has known the power of a Saviour's love. She died in hope of the glory of God about to be revealed to her. Like summer plants the most sainted believer sickens and dies, but thanks be to God for the Gospel which proclaims immortality for those cold limbs about to be folded in the coffin.

I sometimes fear that I am not prepared to die at any time, - that I do not keep the shortness and uncertainty of life sufficiently in view, and it seems too that I do not think enough of heaven as a reality. I have faith but surely it is weak; for I do not find these unseen realities in my everyday thoughts and plans. Were I sure that in a few years I should go to France and that I might be taken there at any time, I am sure that it would exert a controlling influence upon all of my plans; but here is a city whose maker and builder is God - Heaven in whose length and breadth not a mortal or unholy thing is found, to this place I admit and claim that at any time I may be removed, and still, strange to say, I almost forget it in seeking a path through the world. Again when I reflect upon the magnitude of life's duties, and upon the numberless paths which lead astray, and feel at the same time that I am so susceptible of bad impressions, I think of the lines which begin thus: "O fear not thou to die,
But rather fear to live".

My sheet I see is nearly full and I must close. I am really happy, Mr. Newton, to think of having you as a correspondent. I have many friends but none so aged and experienced as yourself. I feel that I have need of the advice and counsel of Christians. I am sure I shall always give your letters a heart's welcome. I thank you for the expressions of esteem which you have tendered me in your kind letter but feel that I do not deserve them.

Remember me with much respect to your partner, and may you always be cheered and upheld by the God of all consolation. Goodbye.

Yours with much respect,

John Muir.